

Boston Chicken venture to buy Bagel Stop chain

By Penny Parker

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Progressive Bagel Concepts Inc., the Boston Chicken-backed bagel company, is expected to close a deal tomorrow to purchase the 10-store Bagel Stop chain.

The Bagel Stop restaurants will be renamed Einstein's, Progressive Bagel's operating name for its stores. Neither Progressive Bagel spokesman Gary Gerdemann nor Bagel Stop owner Tom Wilscam would discuss the issue. But a source close to the deal said that "the ink on the sales agreement is all but dry."

Progressive Bagel is expected to replace Bagel Stop's bagels with Progressive Bagel's own recipe. Progressive Bagel Concepts Inc. was created last March after Golden-based Boston Chicken invested \$20 million in the new company that combined Brackman Brothers Inc. of Salt Lake City; Bagel & Bagel Inc. of Kansas City, Mo.; and Offerdahl's Bagel Gourmet Inc. of Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

Progressive Bagel also opened its headquarters in the Denver West Office Park

last March near Boston Chicken's headquarters. Denver restaurant consultant John Imbergamo said the key issue in the Bagel Stop buyout is real estate.

"There are a variety of concepts that are all looking at the same amount of space — 1,500 to 3,000 square feet — and generally the same demographic," Imbergamo said. "If in fact PBCI is buying Bagel Stop for the leases, it's a smart way to get 10 Einstein's built without having to negotiate leases, find space or build out new restaurants."

Wilscam reportedly wants to sell his relatively small chain before the bagel invasion escalates to an out-and-out war. Bruegger's Fresh Bagel Bakery, the nation's largest bagel store chain, recently opened two stores in the metro area and plans to open 30 more within five years. Chesapeake Bagel Bakery opened recently in Aurora and plans to put as many as 35 bagel stores here by 1998.

Big Apple Bagels is another chain with big plans for the Denver market. Big Apple plans to open 15 stores in the Denver market by the end of next year.